

In the Studio with Lillian Stillwell: Methodology and Values

"Lillian Stillwell has, with her unconventional, interdisciplinary art, turned Münster an inspiring place for dance."

-Bettina Trouwborst, *tanz Zeitschrift*, 4.2025

"Lillian Stillwell's choreographies are less concerned with external plot than with the hidden emotional forces from which human action springs. Therein lies her unique artistic independence."

Under her leadership, an ensemble has flourished in Münster that impresses with its expressiveness, versatility, and extraordinary cohesion. A Dance Department has established itself as a place of artistic curiosity, intellectual openness, and cultural relevance."

- 2026 Prize for Artistic Excellence, *Society of Music and Theater Friends of Münster*

In an era marked by speed, digitality and self-mirroring, dance has the particular ability to connect audiences to authentic experiences. Mere virtuosity and youthful perfection in dance can leave us cold. My aim is to touch audiences.

Working closely with the music, I use dialogue-based methods to draw on dancers' embodied knowledge, working in a spirit of trust and mutual respect with injury prevention and regeneration considered alongside technical and artistic development.

My process starts with seed material from my own, music-driven improvisations. Once the movement is learned by the dancers, it is expanded and enriched in a shared process that draws on each dancer's unique physical potential and emotional range. Authentic expression matters to me as much as explosive physicality. Musical precision comes next: my dancers are highly skilled at analyzing, counting and interpreting music. The elaborate composition phase that follows requires patience from everyone. I love complexity and take time to uncover its subtle potential.

I understand choreography as writing. With each piece, I develop a distinct set of key movements that act as signifiers or terms. Through repetition, variation and recontextualization, these signifiers become tools with which I excavate the work's content.

I use circular methods, returning repeatedly to deeper philosophical and physical questions driving the piece, aiming for excellence while remembering we are only human. The space is shaped by who we are each day during the process.

My approach is nourished by the wisdom of my dancers, enriched through team collaboration, refreshed by working with students and apprentices, broadened by my leadership work and shaped by my longstanding commitment to social sustainability in dance.

Lillian Stillwell, Summer 2026